



Unknown subjects painted by Joan Holt featured in Canberra portrait exhibition

666 ABC Canberra

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PHOTO: Charlotte Bunt with her late mother Joan A Holt's portraits, including herself as a young girl. (666 ABC Canberra: Kim Lester)

Imagine walking into a portrait exhibition and realising your great uncle, a cousin, or even you are one of the subjects.

MAP: Canberra 2600

Eighty portraits of unnamed subjects will go on display at Googong Foreshore this weekend in an exhibition that invites people to "Spot Your Canberra Relly".

The artist was Michelago farmer Joan Holt — known for a time as "the egg lady" — who kept her passion for art and portraiture very private.

She was so dedicated to her craft that she would paint anyone who was willing to sit for her.

Ms Holt rarely signed the portraits, did not record her subjects' names, and often gave the paintings away.

Her daughter Charlotte Bunt believes she painted more than 1,000 portraits between the late 1970s until her death in 2005.

"She just kept painting until the very end and she painted every week," Ms Bunt told ABC Radio.

"They were mainly university students back in the late 70s and early 80s.

"They would pay the students to come and sit for them, or they could chose a portrait in kind, and that's where many of her portraits went."

Shy artist honoured in memoirs

Ms Bunt said her mother was very secretive about her art but would often say she would have a "blossoming" in her eighties and finally show her work.

However, she died from bowel cancer when she was 77.

"It was unbelievable because she was the healthiest woman you'd ever meet," Ms Bunt said.

"It was unlucky... but she got her wish; she didn't want to become a dotty old woman who couldn't look after herself.

"She went out as quickly as she came into this life and she was very busy; there was no wasted time at all."



PHOTO: Joan A Holt left hundreds of portraits of anonymous subjects. (666 ABC Canberra: Kim Lester)

Can you Spot Your Canberra Relly?

The exhibition will be both a tribute to the artist and a mission to find the subjects, strangers to Ms Bunt.

However not all of the subjects were unfamiliar.

As well as a portrait of herself as a child, Ms Bunt discovered one painting of her beloved grandfather, high court judge Henry Thomas Eulert Holt, and one of historian Manning Clark.

"She took hundreds of photos of Manning Clark; she was fascinated by his face," Ms Bunt said.

The portrait of Manning Clark will be auctioned at the one-day exhibition to raise money for The Cancer Support Group.

The exhibition will be held on Saturday May 7, at the London Bridge Woolshed on Googong Foreshore, which is named after a nearby rock formation known as the London Bridge arch.

Ms Bunt has arranged for a charter bus to leave from Queanbeyan, however bookings must be made by May 3.

As well as exhibiting 80 of her mother's portraits for the first time, Ms Bunt has written *A Blossoming: A memoir of Australian Artist Joan A Holt*.

Contact 62363141 or visit Ms Bunt's website for more information.



PHOTO: London Bridge Woolshed on Googong Foreshore will be the setting for the 'Spot Your Canberra Relly' portrait exhibition. (Supplied: Charlotte Bunt)

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